

## FUNCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FUNCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS AS APPLIED TO THE EUGENE, OREGON FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT

#### EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project examines how leadership teams develop, function, and sustain themselves during periods of change. The problem was the lack of a standard criteria for leadership team development, and functional team process in the fire service. The purpose of the research was to identify standardized components of team leadership that could be incorporated into a team improvement strategy.

The project employed action research to answer four questions: How do effective leadership teams initially develop and begin growth? What are the essential characteristics of an effective, cohesive, and self-directed leadership team? What are the common behaviors that reduce group effectiveness and make teams dysfunctional? How do leadership teams sustain effectiveness during periods of organizational and environmental change?

The procedure involved a literature review of material obtained from the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center, the University of Oregon's Knight Library, and the City of Eugene, Oregon's Human Resources and Risk Services Department, Training Section. This information was then summarized and placed into categories using the four research questions. The articles which most closely followed the established parameters of the research project were retained and reviewed more thoroughly to confirm their relevance to the research. This information was then used to analyze the functions of the Eugene, Oregon Fire Department Command Team. Although the Command Team includes all managerial and chief officer positions in the organization, for the purpose of this research, only those members of the Command Team assigned as shift chief officers were evaluated

and used in this research project.

The major findings of this study were: 1) Eugene Fire & EMS has no particular norm that applied to captains promoted into chief officer positions. Instead, these officers tended to come with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and areas of expertise. Eugene's chief officer selection process is in keeping with the recommendations obtained from the literature review for team member selection. 2) Although it was determined that most of the essential characteristics of an effective, cohesive, and self-directed leadership team were present in Eugene's Command Team, there were some missing characteristics that effect productivity and function. 3) The common behaviors present in Eugene's Command Team that reduce group effectiveness tended to be more apparent when group goals were unclear, and group process broke down. 4) Currently the Eugene Fire & EMS Department is undergoing many organizational, environmental, and structural changes. This has had an impact on the Team's ability to function effectively. Another relevant factor that has effected Eugene's Command Team is a degree of turn over in non-line managerial positions attributed to retirement, and managers accepting positions in other fire service agencies. These significant changes have all contributed to some instability for the Team.

Since change is often an element beyond the Team's control, the recommendations arising from this research were directed towards those elements the Team has control over. The goal of this project was to improve the performance of the Eugene Fire and EMS Department's Command Team.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research project examines how leadership teams develop, function, and sustain themselves during periods of change. Because of the complexities involved in modern fire service management, it is critical for fire service leaders to understand how to function effectively in a team environment. This research analyzed the components of effective teams, and then measured these findings against the Eugene, Oregon Fire and EMS Department's Command Team. For the purpose of this project, only those members of the Command Team assigned as shift chief officers were evaluated and used in this research project.

The problem was to identify the critical elements of functional leadership teams, define the stages of team development, and determine how teams sustain effectiveness during periods of change. Eugene's Command Team was then analyzed to determine its commonalities and differences as compared with the findings of the literature.

The purpose of this research was to analyze Eugene's Fire and EMS Command Team's ability to function as a group, and improve performance. To accomplish this, action research methodology was used to apply new information and theories to the actual organization's need. This was accomplished by answering the following research questions:

- 1) How do effective leadership teams initially develop and begin growth?
- 2) What are the essential characteristics of an effective, cohesive, and self-directed leadership team?
- 3) What are the common behaviors that reduce group effectiveness and make teams dysfunctional?

- 4) How do leadership teams sustain effectiveness during periods of organizational and environmental change?

**Limitations:**

The major limitation of this research was the six month time frame for project completion. While a successful leadership team profile was developed, there was insufficient time to measure any effect that applied measures would have on the actual agency. Although causal-comparative research could have produced these findings and possibly been more appropriate for this research project, action research was selected because of the time constraints.

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Volatile politics, shrinking budgets, changes in technology, and unpredictable labor relations are just a few of the challenges confronting modern day fire service management. In the past, fire service agencies were very traditional and organized with a few individuals making most of the significant decisions. In its day, this system worked relatively well in keeping up with the demands. As the Twenty-First Century approaches, the need for more people to absorb an ever increasing work load and help run the organization, has become readily apparent. It is this need that has created the necessity for developing the leadership team concept.

Leadership teams are groups of managers who work closely together to develop policy, address issues, and manage organizational change. The strength of working in a team environment promises the advantage of diverse views, collective experience, and the associated synergy that develops a functional collective process.

There are also a number of dysfunctional behaviors which can develop in leadership teams.

These behaviors can distort perceptions, diminish productivity, and generally harm the organization. It is therefore important to understand the dynamics involved in team process and development.

This research project addresses "working as a team," which was instructional unit number one of the Executive Development course at the National Fire Academy. Specifically, this research project focusses on team development, successful team characteristics, behaviors that create team dysfunction, and maintaining stability during change. This information is then compared against actual Command Team practices within the Eugene, Oregon Fire and EMS Department.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature reviewed for this research was taken from a variety of sources. Although fire service publications were consulted, other sources external to the fire service were reviewed as well to provide a diverse perspective. To aid in assimilation, the acquired information was subdivided into four main sections that followed the research questions listed above.

### **How do effective leadership teams initially develop and begin growth?**

When selecting new members for a leadership team it is important to measure more than a candidate's technical knowledge, or their ability to manage one component of the position, such as emergency operations management. "If we break the chains of fire service thinking, we can probably find some unique abilities that will aid the management of the fire service." (Jones 1987)

Hersey and Blanchard (p. 161) have found through their research that many large companies have created problems by developing selection processes that seek personalities congruent with the corporate norm. Although this creates a harmonious organization, this approach tends to "stifle creativity and innovation." Hersey and Blanchard go on to say that many organizations that have tended

to promote from within, have switched to hiring externally to avoid "management inbreeding." (p. 162)

"What is often needed in organizations is more emphasis on team building in which people are hired who complement rather than replicate a manager's style." (Hersey and Blanchard, p. 162) This follows the concept of selecting team members who can compensate for areas of deficiencies as opposed to selecting individuals who are similar to existing team members and perpetuate the inherent weakness.

Another important characteristic of team development is the need for interdependence. Doctor Robert Trivers' study on the "Principals of Social Evolution," published in 1985 (as cited in Cavage, 1989), found that animal and human behavior had a direct relationship between team development and member interdependence.

One factor is simply how often people happen to be in each other's company. We now have evidence that when individuals repeatedly interact, they may develop a form of cooperation in which they trade acts of altruism. But this breaks down as soon as they're no longer associating often. (Trivers, 1985 as cited in Cavage, 1989)

From this, Cavage (1989) goes on to hypothesize that "buried within this discovery (Trivers) is the vital linkage of team development." Building a strong degree of team interdependence instills individual interest in seeing the team succeed.

During development, effective leadership teams undergo a series of steps as the individual members of the team come together and begin to grow as a unit. Peter R. Scholtes (1992), has identified four stages of team growth. They are:

- 1) Stage 1: Forming - team members transition from being an individual, to a team



member.

- 2) Stage 2: Storming - team members begin addressing the task without being fully developed as a functional team.
- 3) Stage 3: Norming - team members begin "accepting the team, its ground rules or norms, their roles in the team, and the individuality of fellow members."
- 4) Stage 4: Performing - team members have settled into their relationship and have a set of shared expectations with other members. Strengths and weaknesses have been identified and accepted. The team begins to diagnose problems and function as a singular unit.

After completing these steps, the leadership team becomes an effective and cohesive unit.

When a team has started getting the work done, they have achieved all four steps of development. If the work is not getting done, then a level of dysfunction exists within the team and the team leader needs to begin diagnosing the problem and developing a corrective strategy.

Barbara J. Parker, Editor for Trainer's Workshop, states that, "If you are going to expect a team approach to work in your organization, you have to train people in group problem solving, create a new performance measurement system, and find ways to reward people equitably for team participation. (Parker, 1991)

When initially developing a team, it is important to also consider the significance of size. Cavage (1989) asserts that, "teams work best when there are few members. Seven to fifteen is an ideal number. If a team gets much larger it becomes unwieldy."

**What are the characteristics of an effective and successful leadership team?**

The literature indicates there are a number of key elements that exist in effective teams. Of fundamental importance however, is the necessity that team members have a common perception of each other's roles in the group, and have a set of shared goals and objectives. (Hersey & Blanchard , p. 161) Additionally, these goals and objectives must be formal and stated by the team in order to maintain their significance. (Hersey & Blanchard, p. 321)

In addition to goals and objectives, Hersey & Blanchard also identify interdependence as a critical element of successful teams. To share or agree on a common goal only makes two or more team members a collection of individuals. On the other hand, if two or more members of a team require assistance from each other to achieve a shared goal, then a state of interdependence exists. (p. 321)

Cavage (1989) also identifies interdependence as a characteristic of successful teams as previously discussed in the initial development and growth section of this paper. Cavage also considers leadership an essential part of any functionally successful team. "One person needs to be clearly designated as the decision maker for a particular phase of the task." While input from various group members is important, the successful team is not democratic in its operation, and individual decisions are not voted on by team members. (Cavage, 1989)

The successful team also has its own set of group interests, collective needs, and rules by which the team interacts. Scholtes (p. 6-10) lists what he calls "the recipe for a successful team."

- 1) Clarity in Team Goals - agrees on its mission, sees the mission as workable, has a clear vision and can progress towards its goals, and is clear about the larger project goals and

about the purpose of individual steps.

- 2) An Improvement Plan - has created an action plan, knows what resources are available and training needed.
- 3) Clearly Defined Roles - has formally designated roles with each team member understanding what is expected of them, understanding of what roles are individual, and what roles are shared, uses each team members talents and involves all team members in activities.
- 4) Clear Communication - good discussion is dependant on how well information is passed between team members.
- 5) Beneficial Team Behaviors - functional teams encourage members to use those skills which make working together more effective.
- 6) Well Defined Decision Procedures - teams should be well versed in the different ways to make decisions.
- 7) Balanced Participation - Since all team members have an interest in the teams accomplishments, everyone should share in the processes.
- 8) Established Ground Rules - ground rules, or norms, should be established which provide shared expectations and a shared understanding of what won't be tolerated.
- 9) Awareness of the Group Process - team members are individually responsible for their understanding of the group processes as well personal participation in team activities.
- 10) Use of Scientific Approach - teams that use good data in decision making find less difficulty in finding permanent solutions to problems.

Although their list of necessary attributes is shorter than the one presented by Scholtes above, Reilly, and Jones (1974) assert that in order for a team to function effectively, several characteristics must exist and be in practice:

The group must have a charter or reason for working together. Members of the group must be interdependent -- they need each other's experience, abilities, and commitment in order to arrive at mutual goals. Group members must be committed to the idea that working together as a group leads to more effective decisions than working in isolation. The group must be accountable as a functioning unit within a larger organizational context.

Likewise, Kormanski and Mozyer (1987) "note four essential elements of team behavior." The team members must have mutual goals or a reason to work together. Team members must perceive a need for an interdependent working relationship. Individuals must be committed to the group effort. The group must be accountable to a higher level within the organization.

Good communication is another important element in effective teams. Dinsmore (1991) asserts that, "communication is the essence of team building." Communications between two individuals flows from one party to the other in one of two directions. In the team setting, communication is often "multi-directional." (Dinsmore, 1991)

An effective communicator in a group environment must process the information to be communicated following a series of steps. Dinsmore (1991) identified these steps as: Developing a clear concept of the idea, translating the message into a language or format that will be received and understood by the team, transmitting the message through the right media, and monitoring the receiver's

understanding of the message.

The communicator must know their audience, and be cognizant of the impact they are having on the other team members. This feedback can be obtained through verbal responses from group members, or through more subtle body language which can communicate how the information is being received. (Dinsmore, 1991)

Good communication is also dependant upon good listeners. Every member of the team needs to develop, maintain, and practice good active listening skills. This includes asking clarification questions when messages are not fully understood, and using paraphrasing when appropriate, to insure the correct meaning of the communication has been received. (Dinsmore, 1991)

The authors cited in this portion of the literature review share a similar perspective of what they consider the critical elements of functional teams. Although each author attaches a different label to these elements, in content they are basically the same characteristics.

Although successful teams focus on their commonalities as members, the literature also identifies the needs of the individual team member as being an important element in the process of effective team development. Peters and Waterman (p. 102) identify four basic elements which comprise the individual team member's basic needs. People's need for meaning. People's need for a modicum of control. People's need for positive reinforcement, to think of themselves as winners in some sense. And the degree to which actions and behaviors shape attitudes and beliefs rather than vice versa.

In her interview with Ed Magar, Organizational Consultant, Peggy Seeger reports that, "From

the employee's perspective, being a member of a team provides them with a greater sense of involvement in and ownership of a project." (Seeger, 1991) Teams also provide individuals with, "a supportive environment to express controversial ideas, resolve conflicts with other employees, and receive and offer assistance." (Seeger, 1991) These findings focus on the needs of the individual and place an importance on their influence in the group process.

**What are the common behaviors that reduce group effectiveness and make leadership teams dysfunctional?**

In addition to the traits of successful team development, there are a number of behaviors that negatively impact and obstruct team effectiveness. Reilly and Jones in their article "Team Building," (1974), identify and label twelve commonly observed behaviors by individuals that obstruct team effectiveness. These behaviors are:

- 1) The Saboteur - a team member who engages in behavior that intentionally destroys or reduces team effectiveness.
- 2) The Sniper - a team member who erodes team effectiveness by interjecting negative comments designed to disrupt group process.
- 3) The Assistant Trainer - a team member who purposely interjects themselves in discussions for the sole purpose of demonstrating their group awareness and self importance.
- 4) The Denier - a team member who is unwilling to take a strong position on any matter. The denier tends to back down when confronted.

- 5) The Quiet Member - a team member who does not contribute, but sits in silence and observes.
- 6) The Anxious Member - a team member who engages in counter-productive behaviors such as, smoothing over conflict, avoiding confrontation, and protecting the team leader.
- 7) The Dominator - a team member who talks too much and controls the group through dominating the conversation.
- 8) The Side Tracker - a team member who wastes an inordinate amount of time by bringing up issues that redirect the teams energy and focus rather than staying on track with established tasks.
- 9) The Hand-Clasper - a team member who takes a position of safety by agreeing with others. This person rarely expresses their own ideas and avoids conflict whenever possible.
- 10) The Polarizer - a team member who calls attention to differences among members instead of focussing on similarities. This person can have a negative impact on group cohesion.
- 11) The Attention-Seeker - a team member who draws excessive attention to them self. This person will work towards placing themselves in a favorable light at the expense of group process.
- 12) The Clown - a team member who is disruptive and avoids problem-solving activities through humor and play. This person is driven by the need to entertain as opposed to accomplishing group goals and objectives.

The dysfunctional team behaviors cited by Reilly and Jones (1974), consist of both passive and aggressive forms of disorder. Each behavior distracts the team and precludes the group from working up to their ultimate potential. Dysfunctional behaviors can exist in differing degrees of severity, can occur during different points in the group process, and can take place concurrently. An effective team must be able to recognize the adverse behavior, and take corrective action to neutralize the effect.

While it is important to call attention to dysfunctional behavior, labeling the detractor should be avoided because this act will most likely elicit defensiveness. A better approach is to draw attention to the disorder, specify what the dysfunctional effects of the behavior are, and suggest alternative behaviors. (Reilly and Jones, 1974)

Kormanski and Mozenter (1987) contend that, "organizational failures often are not a result of poor leadership but of poor followership." If individual team members do not understand how to follow the direction of the team, it becomes difficult to accomplish group goals and objectives. "A team member is one of a group of mutual followers." (Kormanski and Mozenter, 1987)

Cavage (1989) asserts that, "teams fail - and the failure rate has been high - primarily because they (teams) do not impose on themselves self-discipline and responsibility." Cavage goes on to say that this often happens because team organization lends itself to a high degree of freedom. This can be an advantage in fostering creativity, but it can also be a disadvantage because teams are made up of individuals who inherently stray from team goals and objectives. Without clear direction, self-discipline, and responsibility, this situation becomes more dramatic. "No team can be permissive and function." (Cavage, 1989)

Parker cites a report from Industry Week, that "supervisory resistance, inadequate training and



incompatible systems, especially in the area of compensation, are the main obstacles to the success of the team approach." (Industry Week report as cited by Parker, 1991)

While individual considerations such as compensation, training, and the fulfilling of personal needs have an effect on group function, one of the more common maladies is that of "groupthink." (Janis, p. 223)

Irving L. Janis describes groupthink as the "phenomena of social conformity" where team members allow their own judgement to be subverted by the norms and thought processes of the group. In its extreme form, groupthink can result in team members "remaining loyal to the group by sticking with the policies to which the group has already committed itself, even when those policies are obviously working out badly and have unintended consequences that disturb the conscience of each member." (Janis, p. 224)

The probability of groupthink tends to increase with group cohesiveness. "Groupthink involves non-deliberate suppression of critical thoughts as a result of internalization of the group's norms." (Janis, p. 224) The danger is not that individual team members will suppress their objections to what other team members may suggest, but that individual team members will think suggestions are good without critically examining logical alternatives. (Janis, p. 224)

The problem is that the advantages of having decisions made by groups are often lost because of powerful psychological pressures that arise when the members work closely together, share the same set of values and, above all, face a crisis situation that puts everyone under intense stress. (Janis, p. 225)

Solomon E. Asch (p. 157) through a series of psychological experiments on both independent

subjects, and subjects involved in group process, drew a set of conclusions about psychological process and an individual's ability to express their opinions. In the area of dysfunction, Asch identified three main abnormal reactions to group pressure, or "groupthink," as defined by Janis. These were:

Distortion of Perception - in this category, the subjects unknowingly changed their own perceptions to match the group majority. Distortion of Judgement - in this category, the subjects joined the group majority because they believed their own perceptions were inaccurate. Distortion of Action - in this category, the subjects suppressed their personal opinion, and joined the group majority with complete awareness of what they were doing.

From these experiments, Asch concluded that those subjects who were affected adversely by group pressure had a strong tendency to yield to the group, and supported the group at the expense of their own perceptions and judgement. When these conditions exist, the advantages of team involvement and team process are greatly reduced.

### **How do leadership teams sustain effectiveness during periods of organizational and environmental change?**

The literature places a high degree of importance on acceptance from the team that change is necessary. Peters and Waterman assert that, "It is not so much the articulation of goals about what an institution should be doing that creates new practice. It's the imagery that creates the understanding, the compelling moral necessity the new way is right." (p. 102) Without the team's acceptance that change is necessary, it is difficult to insure that team members will commit themselves to an adequate level of participation in group processes.

Fetteroll, Hoffherr, and Moran likewise believe that teams must be motivated and accepting of

change. "The most powerful motivator is an expected response to the (WIIFM) question, what's in it for me." (Fetteroll, et. al., p. 82) Of basic importance in motivating team members is the development of a shared sense of purpose. They also assert that teams develop strength through achieving "measurable, attainable outcomes" which lead to a feeling of success, and this helps build strength in the team. (Fetteroll, et. al., p. 82)

In addition to the ability to accept change, teams must also be adaptable to conditions that effect group process. "The important thing to remember is keeping the team participation dynamic and flexible." Jones (1987) asserts that an open minded fire chief, and leadership team, can produce long-term benefits because of their ability to view conditions from different perspectives. This is especially true during times of change and instability when there are fewer conditions which remain constant.

Another important trait shared by successful teams during times of transition is the ability to maintain, clear and open communication among team members. This fosters a healthy attitude toward team process and toward collectively achieving team goals. (Fetteroll, et. al., p. 83)

Team work has become more important today than it has been in the past. This is primarily due to the rapid, "economic, societal, cultural, environmental, technological, political and international change that is taking place at an accelerating rate." (Dinsmore 1991) Dinsmore continues by saying that, "functional teams and project teams are replacing the cumbersome hierarchical organizational structure of the past in many organizations." This is because the team approach enables organizations to better respond to an ever changing environment.

Kormanski and Mozenter assert that, "team building has become necessary as a process to control organizational change by a group whose members are joined together in pursuit of a common

purpose." In their view, teams are replacing individuals as, "the primary unit of focus," because they are so much better at managing change. This is because "individual effort is having less and less impact." (Kormanski, Mozenter, 1987)

Another important aspect of managing change through team process is the preparation of the team itself. Ann Murphy Springer (1990) believes in preparing leadership teams for change through "Retreats." A retreat is an ideal setting to broach the subject of change or develop new ideas because the group is isolated without the usual interruptions associated with the day to day schedule. "If planned, managed, and followed up properly, a formal retreat can solve or head off numerous problems in a relatively short but intense period of time." (Springer, 1990)

Retreats usually involve senior or middle managers who have collectively removed themselves from their normal work environment. Retreats are designed to "focus time, attention, and talent intensely and without interruption when a fire agency is at a crossroad, experiencing a crisis, or pro-actively trying to avoid a crisis." (Springer, 1990)

Springer goes on to say that an important part of the retreat process is to, "focus specifically on the goals and results to be achieved at the retreat." By doing this the group has a better chance of maintaining their focus. Springer also considers it important to have an agenda, and bring along the appropriate data to aid in decision making.

## **PROCEDURES**

The literature review was conducted to obtain an academic understanding of how functional leadership teams develop, maintain their effectiveness, and sustain themselves during change. Eugene's

Fire and EMS Command Team was then analyzed from two different perspectives. (1) Individual members were profiled by skill set and personality type to determine if there was a Command Team norm. (2) The Team was then observed in group interaction over a period of three and a half months during which their collective action was compared to the information learned in the literature review.

Additionally, Command Team members were all interviewed on an informal basis without their knowledge of the purpose. The reason for this approach was to illicit their honest perspectives on team interaction and function.

To process the information obtained during this analysis, four research questions were developed and used as a framework. As previously stated, action research was the methodology of choice for collecting information in the following four areas: Development of functional leadership teams. Characteristics which make leadership teams effective. Behaviors which create leadership team dysfunction and ineffectiveness. And teams that sustain effectiveness and maintain stability during change.

Literature was obtained from the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center, the University of Oregon's Knight Library, and the City of Eugene, Oregon, Human Resources and Risk Services Department, Training Section.

The literature was summarized and placed into categories using the four research questions. The articles which most closely followed the established parameters of the research project were retained and reviewed more thoroughly to confirm their relevance to the research. Although fire service literature was consulted in the research and cited in the "Literature Review," an attempt was made to

break the traditional confines of fire service thinking by evaluating literature from other non-fire service sources.

A number of the findings included steps or numerated elements of team development, group processes, or behaviors of dysfunction. Important concepts in the research were corroborated with more than one source in most instances. In some cases numbering was used to aid the reader in delineating between the various elements or behaviors cited.

The results of the research project were discussed in the listed order of the individual research questions. Some literature findings were combined in the results section to limit redundancy, and some Team observations were summarized to control the length of this paper.

The assimilated information was then used to identify the important elements of building and sustaining successful leadership teams. These elements in addition to the observations, are identified in the "results section," analyzed in the "discussion section," and profiled in the "recommendations section."

As stated in the "Introduction" of this paper, the six month time frame for project completion was the major limitation of this research project, and the reason action research methodology was selected. This short time frame precluded a meaningful evaluation period to measure the results of any implemented strategies.

## **RESULTS**

### **Personal Profiles and Skill Sets of Eugene Fire and EMS Command Team Members:**

It is important to give some attention to understanding the individual characteristics of the members of the Command Team. Therefore, each member is briefly profiled in this section so that the reader understands the composition of the Team. While individuality is subordinate to a group's

collective function in the true team environment, it still has a profound impact on how teams interact, produce outcomes, and perceive themselves.

Although this paper does not delineate individual performance, a brief look at the individuals who comprise the Team seemed appropriate.

**Chief Officer #1:** This individual is a senior member of the Command Team, and a veteran of Eugene's Fire and EMS system. He possesses good incident management skills, is a traditional thinker, and has some difficulty accepting change. This individual is highly respected by the crews he supervises, and is viewed by the rank and file fire fighters as a manager who stands up for personnel. While he is detail oriented, he has difficulty in using technical advantages available to help him. When assigned tasks, he always completes them on time and in a detailed manner. When functioning in the team environment, he tends to resist innovation.

**Chief Officer #2:** As a newer member of the Command Team, this individual is still in the process of learning his responsibilities, and determining where he fits into the team. He has good intuition, has a natural ability to work well with people, and is a very good listener. Although newer to the team, he actively contributes to group discussions, and avails himself to help other members. His incident management skills are solid, and he too is popular with the crews he supervises. While his technical skills are adequate, they are not his primary area of strength. He is very supportive of the organization and its mission.

**Chief Officer #3:** This chief officer is a senior member of the Command Team. He has a good analytical mind, is unemotional, and possesses good technical skills. This individual works well with others, is a good incident manager, and provides a lot of common sense during group projects and discussion.

He is also able to provide a good historical perspective on various issues due to his lengthy career and very diverse assignments. While he works well with people, his primary skill set is more in tune with detailed projects. He is a good utility team member that can take on any assignment and do it well.

**Chief Officer #4:** This individual is a mid-career chief officer, a talented writer, good speaker, and is extremely good at managing projects. He has the tendency to simultaneously be involved in numerous activities. This chief officer is a solid incident manager, and although has had some past interpersonal conflict with the crews he supervises, he has overcome this difficulty. This person actively participates in Team process, and freely shares his perspective. He possesses good technical skills, is dynamic, has a strong personality, and is self-directed.

**Chief Officer #5:** This chief officer is another senior level employee. He possesses strong analytical and technical skills. He is good at project work, and is capable of technically performing at a much higher level than is required by his position. In addition to being a good incident manager, he possesses strong communication skills. Although he functions well in the Command Team and City organizational environment, he has some difficulty in his interpersonal relationship with the crews he supervises. This is the one area that has caused him the greatest difficulty.

**Chief Officer #6:** This chief officer is in mid-career, and his greatest strength is his ability to manage people. He is very good at accomplishing tasks by working through and with people who are assigned to him. He is a good incident manager, and possesses good technical skills. This individual is very supportive of the organization and the people who work in it. Although he communicates well at the Command Team level, at times he could be more succinct when stating his perspective. He continually carries a large work load yet is always willing to produce more.



**Research Question #1:** How do effective leadership teams initially develop and begin growth?

One of the most critical elements in team development is the selection of its members. There is a tendency in many organizations to select members who fit the norm of the organization. Hersey and Blanchard (p. 162) believe that team members should be selected

who can compensate for areas of deficiencies as opposed to selecting individuals who replicate the existing team profile and perpetuate group weaknesses.

This is an area in which Eugene's Command Team has been very successful. Although the Team shares a common vision and set of goals, individual Team members are very different from one another. In reviewing the individual personalities and profiles of the group, it is obvious that Team members have been selected that compliment one another. Only three consistent characteristic norms could be identified that were common to all Command Team members. They all have the ability to be good emergency managers, they all possess good communications skills, and they all share a sense of loyalty and support for the organization.

Another important aspect of team development is the need for interdependence. The more time team members spend together, the more cooperation, reliance, and interdependence is developed among them. The end result is the generation of more team function. (Trivers, 1985 as cited in Cavage, 1989)

While Eugene's Fire and EMS Command Team have regularly scheduled meetings, there is a common concern shared by all members that the rapidly changing environment in which they exist, does not provide enough time to collectively meet and work through issues. From discussions with

Command Team members, it was felt that too much time is spent identifying and discussing problems as opposed to solving them. Although this appears to be a valid concern, there is no readily available solution to solving this problem. Currently there are work load and capacity issues which preclude scheduling more time for such interaction.

When bringing new members into a team environment, it is important to train people in group problem solving, put into place a performance measurement system that focuses on team product, and find ways to reward members equitably for team participation. (Parker, 1991)

After the individual members of a team are brought together, they go through a series of developmental steps as they grow into one unit. Peter R. Scholtes (1992) identified four stages of team growth which include: Forming, where individual team members transition into a team. Storming, the team becomes task oriented and begins addressing the task without having fully developed as a team. Norming, individual members, "accept the team, its ground rules or norms, their roles in the team, and the individuality of fellow members." Performing, the team begins to diagnose problems and function as a singular unit.

Once these steps are complete, the leadership team becomes an effective and cohesive unit. The team leader will know that all four steps of the development process have occurred when work starts being accomplished.

Being a team with substantial history, tradition, and an accepted operating system, Eugene's Command Team is in the "performing" stage, having already achieved the first three steps of; "forming, storming, and norming." Although this information on the stages of team growth will be helpful in

developing future small teams and task groups, it provides little benefit in improving the functional ability of the existing Team. This information is included in the “results” section to provide a more complete perspective on how teams develop.

Size is the final element to consider in team development. The specific size of a leadership team will depend on a number of variables which include; the size of the organization, the complexity and diversity of its mission, and the nature of the work force. Although factors such as these will influence team composition, Jack Martin Cavage (1989) contends that, "teams work best when there are few members. Seven to fifteen is an ideal number. If a team gets much larger it becomes unwieldy."

The Eugene Command Team, Operations Division, has seven chief officers including the Deputy Chief of Operations. Although this is an adequate number of chiefs to supervise line operations for three twenty-four hour shifts of fifty-one personnel each, it is an insufficient number considering that line chief officers perform many administrative functions. In addition, they are extensively involved in City projects that may or may not pertain to Fire and EMS Operations.

Eugene has shares a similar situation with many other jurisdictions. Fire and emergency medical services in general have become more complex, while the resources to provide these services have stagnated or declined in many communities. Unfortunately, there appears to be no simple or immediate solution to this situation.

**Research Question #2: What are the essential characteristics of an effective, cohesive, and self-directed leadership team?**

The literature indicates there are a number of identifiable key elements that exist in effective teams. One of the most basic of these elements is the need for interdependence among team members.

Creating this reliance between team members was the most commonly identified element of successful teams found in the literature.

Eugene's Command Team has been very successful in this area out of necessity. A strong bond has developed between Command Team members because of the work load, and the fact that to survive organizationally, there is a certain expectation that "business will be taken care of by the team." By having personal career and organizational survival tied to group success, there is little choice but to depend on one another to get the work done.

Successful teams must also possess a set of basic characteristics that define the purpose for team members to work together. Although the literature provided a number of different perspectives on what these characteristics are, each author presented relatively the same set. As a representation, Kormanski and Mozenter (1987), identify four essential elements of team behavior that leads to successful group process. They are: The team members must share mutual goals or have a reason to work together. Team members must perceive a need for an interdependent working relationship. Individuals must be committed to the group effort. And the group must be accountable to a higher level within the organization.

Eugene's Command Team already possesses these characteristics in that mutual goals are routinely identified and serve as a catalyst for working together. There is also a strong sense of interdependence which also drives individual team member commitment to group effort. Additionally, there is a high sense of accountability by members of the Command Team to the public, the organization, and higher authorities within the City's governmental body.

In addition to team characteristics that define purpose, successful teams also possess group

interests and a set of rules that define their interaction. Scholtes (p. 6-10) lists these rules in what he describes as the, "recipe for a successful team." They are; clarity in team goals, an improvement plan, clearly defined roles, clear communication, beneficial team

behaviors, well defined decision procedures, balanced participation of team members, established ground rules, an awareness of group processes, and use of a scientific approach.

While Eugene's Command Team maintains clearly defined goals, roles, and good communication avenues, the Team lacks a realistic improvement plan. As previously discussed, problems are routinely identified and discussed, but sometimes no strategy or plan is developed for improvement. On the other hand, behavior by individual Team members is always professional and appropriate, and there is a balanced level of participation among the group.

Good two way communications is another important element of successful teams. The team environment requires communication that is multi-directional and understood similarly by the members of the team. Prior to sending a message the communicator must develop a clear concept of the idea, adequately translate the message into a language that will be understood by the team, transmit through the appropriate media, and monitor how the message is received by the team. (Dinsmore, 1991)

Good listening skills are an important part of communications. Each team member has an obligation to the group to actively listen and participate in two way communication. If a message is unclear, the listener should ask follow-up questions, without interrupting, and paraphrase where appropriate.

The communicator likewise has a responsibility to insure their message is understood. This can

be done through asking questions of the team, and watching body language which is a non-verbal method of communication.

Eugene's Command Team members are all good communicators. Individuals are not timid about sharing their perspective with the rest of the group. They also share common terminology. All Command Team members can generally be identified as active listeners, and good two way communication is the norm within the group.

Successful teams also provide its members with a safe environment in which they can express their own opinions and perspectives. This sense of security allows team members to be creative in their approach to problem solving, and to participate in team activities.

This is another area in which Eugene's Command Team is already performing well. The Chief of the Fire and EMS Department has long held the ground rule that all discussions taking place in the Command Team forums are to be open, honest, and not subject to reticule. The only caveat is that communication and dialogue are to be appropriate, and respectful. This is a ground rule that is embraced by all Command Team members and helps promote quality communications.

Teams must also provide for the basic needs of its individual members in order for the team to achieve its potential. Peters and Waterman (p. 102), identify four basic needs that successful teams fulfill for their members. These needs are: People's need for meaning. People's need for a modicum of control. People's need for positive reinforcement, to think of themselves as winners in some sense. And people's need for actions and behaviors to shape their attitudes and beliefs.

The structure of Eugene's Command Team provides for a high degree of meeting individual members' needs. Individual members when asked, responded affirmatively that they felt their work had

meaning, that as command level officers they felt a high degree of control over outcome on most issues, and that to a certain degree they each thought of themselves as being successful in their jobs, and within the system.

**Research Question #3: What are the common behaviors that reduce group effectiveness and make teams dysfunctional?**

In addition to exploring characteristics of successful teams, the research was directed toward learning what behaviors obstruct team effectiveness, create dysfunction, and are present in Eugene's Command Team. Reilly and Jones (1974), identified and labeled twelve commonly observed behaviors by individuals that obstruct team effectiveness. They are: "The Saboteur; The Sniper; The Assistant Trainer; The Denier; The Quiet Member; The Anxious Member; The Dominator; The Side Tracker; The Hand-Clasper; The Polarizer; The Attention-Seeker; and The Clown."

During the three and a half month observation of the Command Team's interaction, very little dysfunctional behavior was observed. The Team demonstrated a high degree of maturity which is what should be expected from a senior level leadership group. Therefore, in presenting results associated with this research question, a look at dysfunctional maladies shall be addressed from an academic perspective based on the literature review.

When dealing with dysfunctional behaviors, it is important to call attention to the disorder without applying a label or classification to the offender. What is important is to define the behavior, identify the effect on the team, and suggest alternative behaviors. (Reilly and Jones, 1974)

Another aspect of team dysfunction is poor followership, as defined by Kormanski and

Mozenter. (1987) When individual team members do not follow team direction, it becomes difficult to accomplish group goals and objectives. Teams that are lacking self-discipline and responsibility do not stay on task or function properly. "No team can be permissive and function." (Cavage, 1989)

One of the more subtle but prevalent team dysfunctions is Irving L. Janis' described malady of "groupthink." (Janis, p. 223) Groupthink is the "phenomena of social conformity" where individual team members allow their own judgement to be subverted by the norms and thought processes of the group. Janis found that the probability of groupthink tends to increase with group cohesiveness. In other words, individual team members will think suggestions are good without critically examining logical alternatives. (Janis, p. 224)

Solomon E. Asch identified three main abnormal reactions to group pressure, or groupthink, as defined by Janis. They are; distortion of perception, distortion of judgement, and distortion of action.

While the team environment holds much promise for promoting creativity and achieving more through shared effort, the presence of one or more dysfunctional behaviors can detract greatly from potential accomplishments. It is therefore important that teams have an understanding of what dysfunctional behavior is, be able to properly recognize it, and have the ability to take the appropriate corrective action.

Eugene's Command Team presented itself as a very functional group of professionals overall. When minor signs of dysfunction were apparent, it usually occurred toward the end of long protracted meetings where most members displayed signs of fatigue. Therefore, those minor observations of dysfunction were discounted for the purposes of this research.



**Research Question #4: How do leadership teams sustain effectiveness during periods of organizational and environmental change?**

The literature places an importance on acceptance from the team that change is necessary. Without acceptance that change is necessary, it is difficult to insure that team members will commit themselves to an adequate level of participation in the group process.

When asked, all Eugene Command Team members acknowledged that organizational and environmental change were both necessary and inevitable. Some members expressed concern over the rate of change occurring in the organization and the lack of resources available to meet obligations, but there was no disagreement that change is a reality.

Teams must also be able to adapt to conditions that effect group process. "The important thing to remember is keeping the team participation dynamic and flexible." (Jones, 1987) Teams which can view conditions from different perspectives retain a certain elasticity. This ability allows them to adapt to changing conditions when there are fewer constants to base decisions and actions on.

While all Eugene Command Team members present a dynamic approach to team interaction, the newer members appeared more comfortable with viewing conditions from different perspectives. Senior Command Team members seemed to take more time to step outside their comfort zones and look at issues from a less traditional perspective.

Another important characteristic is consistency. Leadership teams that maintain focus and a sense of direction during times of change and instability add inherent stability to the organization. This sense of direction must be communicated effectively to those who look to the team for leadership.

This is one area where Eugene's Command Team has been very successful. As an example,

within the past year, the Eugene fire fighter's union has shifted its tactics toward an aggressive and adversarial style. This strategy has added some instability to the organization, and placed the silent majority of fire fighters, who possess a moderate perspective, in a precarious position. During this time, the Command Team has provided a stabilizing force for the organization that is a carry over from the relationship that has been developed within the Team. Each Command Team member has learned that they can depend on one another, and each works hard to support the rest of the group.

Clear and open communications is another characteristic of teams that can accept change. Good communications helps the team to accurately process information, and collectively achieve shared goals and objectives.

As previously stated, the Chief of the Department has established a safe environment within which Team members feel they can interact and express themselves. Without this important condition, most members felt that their participation would be stifled, and so would innovation in solving problems.

The team approach has enabled organizations to better respond to an ever changing environment. This is possible because the group approach provides an inherent strength in managing change through shared responsibility. The fact that the workload and responsibility are spread out over a competent group of team members who share a vision, have a common purpose, and provide a supportive environment, allows teams to approach leadership challenges through collective, as opposed to singular action.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Team Member Selection:**

Team composition is probably the single most important element in creating a functional leadership team. Selecting the right individuals for the team, especially when the team's responsibility is to lead the organization, must be given due consideration. When adding new members to the team, the existing team members and their inherent strengths and weaknesses must be taken into account. With this information, leaders have the opportunity to balance out the team's composition. Although the knowledge, capability, and experience of individual team members is important, of greater importance is an individual's ability to function in the team environment.

### **Team Development:**

When bringing new members into the team it is important to properly socialize them into the group. An understanding of the team's culture, norms, and shared goals are essential in building an effective and productive group relationship. Merely coming together as a team and beginning work on a project is insufficient preparation for success. The time spent in development is an important element in achieving a successful outcome.

### **Assessing and Correcting Team Dysfunction:**

Characteristics of team dysfunction can present themselves at any time during team process. A good understanding of what these characteristics are, how they present themselves, and how they are corrected should be understood not only by the team leader, but by each individual team member. Everyone has the responsibility to help control dysfunctional behavior.

### **Sustaining Team Effectiveness During Periods of Change:**

For leadership teams to be successful during times of change, team members must first accept that change is actually necessary and will take place. The team process must then be viewed as dynamic, and be capable of shifting its structure and mission to accommodate the forces experienced. To accomplish this, the communication link between team members, and between the team and external groups, must be clear.

The team must also be able to view themselves from different perspectives external to the group setting. To be able to see the team and their product as others perceive them, helps the team to understand their effect, and adjust to meet the demands of a changing environment.

Eugene has experienced a similar phenomenon to many other jurisdictions in that the fire and emergency medical service has become more complex, while the resources to provide these services have stagnated or declined. There appears to be no simple or immediate solution to this situation.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

When developing a leadership team or adding new members to an existing team, leaders should develop a profile to use as a guide for selection. According to the information acquired in the course of this project, it is important to select members who will function well in a team setting. Individuals who can only produce and function alone, should not be selected if the goal is to develop a functional team that presents a high degree of interaction.

Based on this information, it is recommended that a team inventory be taken prior to designing a selection process. By developing this inventory, the team has a better probability of selecting compatible members to enter the group.

While Eugene's Command Team has been remarkably successful in selected individuals who

strengthen the Team, it is important to always guard against developing a normative personality and skill type. By replicating ourselves, we develop a shallow pool of thought and perspective.

Functional teams must also undergo a period of development in which members learn how to work together as a team. This should include producing an awareness by group members of their individual roles as a part of the team, and how they can best interact with other members. Since this is one of the areas most often ignored in team development, it is recommended that time be devoted to education and awareness of group process for the team as a whole. By developing a shared understanding of the intricacies of team building and group interaction, team members are more likely to succeed in developing a functional process, and producing a quality product. This educational process should be periodically revisited to help maintain focus, and avoid the development of bad habits.

While Eugene's Command Team maintains clearly defined goals, roles, and a good communication system, the Team lacks a realistic improvement plan. As previously discussed, problems are routinely identified and discussed, but sometimes no strategy or plan is developed for improvement. On the other hand, behavior by individual Team members is always professional and appropriate, and there is a balanced level of participation amongst the group.

Once team members are comfortable with this process, they should develop a system to periodically evaluate their adherence to the basic principals of effective team work. While production is easily measured, effective process is more abstract and difficult to quantify. Finally, based on the information obtained from the research, the following questions were constructed as a sample instrument for measuring the level of team effectiveness:

1. Do team members continue to share common goals and agree on the mission?

2. Does the team continue to share consensus on clearly defined group/team roles designated for each member?
3. Do communications continue to be clear? How well is information passed between members?
4. Is participation between team members balanced?
5. Are the established ground rules being adhered to, or have they been modified?
6. Are team members using their individual experience most effectively in working through issues?
7. Is the team using its experience working together in the most effective and productive manner?
8. Is the team's action plan being adhered to? Are existing resources being utilized effectively?
9. Are team members maintaining their commitment to the team, the project, and following an established process?
10. Are team members maintaining an adequate level of interdependence as a group?
11. Have team members maintained an appropriate level of decision making authority?
12. Is adequate progress being made, or is too much time being spent discussing problems without developing solutions?

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